

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS  
7 August 1986**FILE ONLY**

✓ 7:00 P.M.

Former CIA Agent Defects

CONNIE CHUNG: Former CIA agent Edward Lee Howard, accused of selling secrets that devastated U.S. intelligence in Moscow, has been granted political asylum in the Soviet Union. He is believed to be the first known CIA agent to defect to the Soviet Union. Today his whereabouts emerged in the Soviet press.

Art Kent reports.

ART KENT: The item that moved on the Tass news wire in Moscow this morning confirmed what American intelligence had feared for almost a year. Edward Lee Howard, a fugitive former CIA agent, did go to the Soviet Union when he escaped FBI agents last September and has now been granted asylum there.

Former CIA Deputy Director George Carver says Howard's defection gives the Russians a lot of knowledge about the CIA's operations.

GEORGE CARVER: This is a loss of major magnitude, and it is a very, very serious compromise indeed.

KENT: According to intelligence sources, Howard had been trained for a junior agent's posting to Moscow and knew enough about CIA sources and methods that his defection enabled the Russians to almost wipe out CIA operations in Moscow and likely cause the death of at least one major Soviet CIA contact.

How did Howard get away? The CIA had fired him in 1983 when a lie detector test revealed drug abuse and mental instability. Then, last year, KGB defector Vitaly Yurchenko told the CIA that Howard had been working for the Russians since at least 1984, traveling from his New Mexico home to meetings with the KGB. But by

the time the CIA told the FBI, and the FBI started to close in, Howard was gone.

Administration sources confirm that Howard crossed into Mexico, flew to Finland, and from there crossed the border into the Soviet Union.

Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chairman Patrick Leahy has been critical of CIA and FBI handling of the case.

SEN. LEAHY: I think that it has caused a very intensive, and really needed, review of their own internal procedures.

KENT: The FBI disciplined two agents for mishandling the Howard case. The CIA would only say that its security staff was always looking for ways to improve its procedures.

CHUNG: Howard's father, who lives in Garland, Texas, told a local newspaper there that his son called him from Moscow Tuesday morning. He said Howard wants his wife and son to visit him in the Soviet Union, and that he promised to write when he finds a place to live.